RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL DETERMINANTS AND ACHIEVEMENT GOAL ORIENTATION AMONG COACHES

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ABSTRACT
Achievement Goal Orientation Theory (Nicholls, 1984, 1989) is one of the most widely recognized theories in the field of sport. There are a lot of scientific studies that have examined the goal orientations among athletes, but what about the achievement goal orientation profile of sports coaches? It has hardly been studied in the sports psychology literature. This study aimed to examine the relationship and influence of personality characteristics: emotional intelligence and self-esteem, on the goal orientations (task and ego) among sports coaches. Methods: The research was done among 104 coaches from different sports (30 women and 74 men, aged between 19 and 63 years old), divided into groups according to their gender, age, coaching experience, level of education, place of residence, and type of sport (individual or teams). Results: The comparative analysis revealed statistically significant differences in almost all groups for the studied variables. No statistically significant differences are revealed by level of education (High or Secondary), with the exception of self-esteem. The regression analysis showed that task goal orientation is influenced by regulation of emotions (own and others), but ego goal orientation is not influenced by any of the studied variables, which is also confirmed by the results of the correlation analysis. Conclusions: The results obtained in our study show important interdependencies between the studied psychological indicators regarding the personal characteristics of coaches and expand the theory of achievement goal orientation, which at present mainly focuses on research on athletes.

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INTRODUCTION

Sport in the modern world is much more than physical activity; it is a complex system of achievements, challenges, and personal development. At the heart of this process is the sports coach, whose role extends far beyond purely technical training. Coaches play a crucial role in shaping athletes' motivation, psychological resilience, and overall well-being. Despite the growing recognition of their influence, much of the sport psychology literature has traditionally focused on athletes, leaving the profile of coaches themselves understudied.

In this context, understanding the psychological characteristics of sports coaches, such as their goal orientation, emotional intelligence, and general self-esteem, becomes paramount.

These aspects not only determine the coach's personal performance and satisfaction but also directly influence their leadership style, the motivational climate they create, and ultimately – the effectiveness of the training process and the achievements of their protégés. The present study aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the aforementioned psychological variables among Bulgarian sports coaches, as well as to examine the influence of various demographic and professional factors on them.

Achievement Goal Theory, developed by Nicholls (1984; 1989), is one of the most influential theoretical frameworks in sport psychology for understanding motivation. It suggests that individuals are guided by two main types of goal orientations in the context of achievement: *Task Orientation,* characterized by a focus on skill mastery, personal improvement, and progress. Individuals with high task orientation measure their success against their own previous achievements and efforts. They tend to derive satisfaction from the learning process, regardless of comparison with others, and are more resilient to setbacks, viewing them as opportunities for improvement. *Ego Orientation:* Involves a focus on comparison with others and demonstrating superior abilities compared to competitors. Success is defined by outperforming others. Individuals with high ego orientation are strongly motivated by victory and public recognition but can be more vulnerable to setbacks, especially when their abilities are not the highest.

Although much of the research on this theory has focused on athletes, its application to coaches is equally relevant, as their own motivational framework can influence the way they lead, evaluate, and motivate their athletes.

Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize emotions – both one's own and those of others – to facilitate thinking and behavior. In the context of sport coaching, emotional intelligence is crucial for effective communication, conflict resolution, team building, and stress management. It includes several key components, such as:

- Self-Emotion Appraisal: Ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions.
- Others' Emotion Appraisal: Ability to recognize and understand the emotions of others.
- Regulation of Emotions: Ability to effectively manage one's own and others' emotions.
- Utilization of Emotions: Ability to use emotions to facilitate thinking and actions, for example, to improve performance or creativity.

General self-esteem represents an individual's overall evaluation of their own worth and significance. It reflects the extent to which a person approves or disapproves of themselves (Rosenberg, 1965). High self-esteem is associated with better psychological adaptation, stress resilience, and more successful coping with challenges. For sports coaches, stable and positive self-esteem is important for maintaining confidence in their own abilities, making decisions under pressure, and effective leadership. The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, standardized for the Bulgarian population (Dilova et al., 2017), was used to measure general self-esteem in this study.

Aim and Objectives

The main aim of the present study is to examine the psychological profile of Bulgarian sports coaches by analyzing their goal orientations (task and ego), the components of emotional intelligence, and general self-esteem, as well as to establish the interrelationships between these variables and the influence of main demographic and professional factors.

Tasks of the research:

- *Determining the psychological profile:* To establish the levels of goal orientations (task and ego), emotional intelligence, and general self-esteem among sports coaches.
- *Analysis of group differences:* To investigate statistically significant differences in the specified psychological variables of coaches depending on their gender, age, coaching experience (as an athlete and as a coach), education, and place of work.
- *Investigation of interrelationships and influence:* To analyze the correlation links between goal orientations, emotional intelligence, and general self-esteem, as well as to reveal the influence of emotional intelligence and general self-esteem on coaches' goal orientations.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study included a total of 104 sports coaches, comprising 30 women and 74 men. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 63 years. The sample is representative of various sports disciplines (individual and team sports) and geographical locations, with coaches from Sofia and other cities in the country. (Table 1)

Table 1. *Researched individuals differentiated into groups*

GROUPS		*N*
GENDER	Women	30
	Men	74
AGE	19-33 yrs.	28
	34-45 yrs.	50
	46-63 yrs.	26
EDUCATION	Higher	86
	Secondary	18
TYPE OF SPORT	Individual	48
	Team	56
CITY	Sofia	58
	Other cities	46
EXPERIENCE AS ATHLETE	up to 12 yrs.	28
	13-20 yrs.	48
	21-34 yrs.	24
EXPERIENCE AS COACH	up to 3 yrs.	28
	4-12 yrs.	50
	13-40 yrs.	26

Procedure

Data collection was conducted entirely online via the Google Forms platform from April to May 2024. All participants were guaranteed complete anonymity and confidentiality regarding the information they provided. Before completing the questionnaires, each participant gave informed consent to participate in the study.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 23 statistical software. Descriptive statistics were performed to describe the main characteristics of the studied variables. To examine differences between groups regarding demographic and professional factors (gender, age, coaching experience (as an athlete and as a coach), education, and city), non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney U test; Kruskal-Wallis H test) were used, given the deviation of the data from normal distribution. Correlation analysis (Pearson) and regression analysis (stepwise) were applied to establish interrelationships between the studied psychological variables.

Method

1. *Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ)* (Duda, 1989)**,** adapted by Domuschieva-Rogleva, 2003. A modified version of the questionnaire was used, which assesses both task orientation and ego orientation of coaches in their professional context.
2. *Bulgarian Short Version of Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS-S):* This questionnaire was developed and validated for Bulgarian conditions by Savcheva and Georgiev (2022). *It is based on the original Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (33 items) by Schutte et al. (1998).* The scale consists of 14 items rated on a 5-point agreement scale and measures four main aspects of emotional intelligence: regulation of emotions, utilization of emotions, self-emotion appraisal, and others' emotion appraisal.
3. *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)* (Rosenberg, 1965)**.** The Bulgarian standardized version of the scale was used (Dilova et al., 2017). It is a 10-item questionnaire designed to measure general self-esteem, with responses on a 4-point Likert scale.

RESULTS

The studied group of coaches is generally characterized by a higher task goal orientation compared to ego goal orientation, with high general self-esteem, and higher scores on all emotional intelligence scales. (Table 2).

Table 2. *Average values of the studied variables***.**

	N	Min	Max	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*
Task Goal Orientation	104	1.00	5.00	4.12	1.05
Ego Goal Orientation	104	1.00	4.67	2.36	0.83
General Self-Esteem	104	28.00	40.00	36.08	3.71
Regulation of Emotions	104	1.00	5.00	4.22	0.74
Utilization of Emotions	104	1.33	5.00	4.20	0.83
Self-Emotion Appraisal	104	1.00	5.00	4.26	0.88
Others' Emotion Appraisal	104	1.33	5.00	4.01	0.82

Comparative analysis by demographic characteristics

Comparative analysis by gender

To investigate potential differences in the studied psychological variables between coaches according to gender, a Mann-Whitney U test for two independent samples was conducted. A statistically significant difference was found in the appraisal of others' emotions between male (mean rank = 47.95) and female (mean rank = 35.54) coaches, U = 728.00, Z = -2.78, $p = .005$. Female coaches showed significantly higher ability to appraise others' emotions compared to male coaches. For the remaining studied variables – task goal orientation, ego goal orientation, regulation of emotions, general self-esteem, utilization of emotions, and self-emotion appraisal – no statistically significant differences were found between male and female coaches (all $p > .05$).

Comparative analysis by age

The age of the coaches was categorized into three groups: Group 1 (19-33 years, $n = 28$), Group 2 (34-45 years, $n = 50$), and Group 3 (46-63 years, $n = 26$). Results from the Kruskal-Wallis H test show statistically significant differences for the following variables: task goal orientation: $\chi^2(2) = 16.157, p < .001$; ego goal orientation: $\chi^2(2)=7.064$, $p = .029$; regulation of emotions: $\chi^2(2) = 6.533$, $p = .038$; self-emotion appraisal: $\chi^2(2) = 18.122$, $p < .001$; others' emotion appraisal: $\chi^2(2) = 14.168$, $p = .001$. Overall, coaches' age is associated with statistically significant differences in task and ego goal orientation and with almost all aspects of emotional intelligence (regulation of emotions, self-emotion appraisal, and others' emotion appraisal). No statistically significant differences were found for general self-esteem and utilization of emotions. To determine between which specific groups these differences existed, pairwise comparisons were conducted between the individual groups (Mann-Whitney U tests). Regarding ego goal orientation, a statistically significant difference was found between Group 2 (mean rank = 33.94) and Group 3 (mean rank = 47.27), U = 422.00, Z = −2.51, p = .012. Coaches from Group 3 showed higher ego orientation. For the regulation of emotions, a statistically significant difference was observed between Group 2 (mean rank = 34.02) and Group 3 (mean rank = 47.12), U = 426.00, Z = -2.48, p = .013. Coaches from Group 3 demonstrated a higher ability for emotion regulation. For self-emotion appraisal, a highly statistically significant difference was found between Group 2 (mean rank = 32.22) and Group 3 (mean rank = 50.58), U = 336.00, Z = -3.58, $p < .001$. Coaches from Group 3 had higher scores in self-emotion appraisal. Regarding others' emotional appraisal, a statistically significant difference was found between Group 2 (mean rank = 33.78) and Group 3 (mean rank = 47.58), U = 414.00, Z = -2.62, p = .009. Coaches from Group 3 showed better ability to appraise others' emotions. For the variables task goal orientation, general self-esteem, and utilization of emotions, no statistically significant differences were found among any of the age groups (all $p > .05$).

Comparative analysis by experience as an athlete

The coaches' experience as athletes was categorized into three groups: Group 1 (up to 12 years, n = 28), Group 2 (13-20 years, n = 48), and Group 3 (21-34 years, n = 24). The results of the comparative analysis (Kruskal-Wallis, H) show statistically significant differences for task goal orientation ($\chi^2(2) = 6.486$, p = .039), general self-esteem ($\chi^2(2) = 6.791$, p = .034), and utilization of emotions ($\chi^2(2) = 8.297$, p = .016). For the remaining studied variables – ego goal orientation, regulation of emotions, self-emotion appraisal, and others' emotion appraisal – no statistically significant differences were found (all $p > .05$).

To determine between which specific groups these differences existed, pairwise comparisons were conducted between the groups (Mann-Whitney U tests). Regarding ego goal orientation, a statistically significant difference was found between Group 1 (mean rank = 35.83) and Group 3 (mean rank = 48.47), with a U = 286.50 and Z = −2.13, p = .033. Coaches from Group 3 showed higher ego orientation. For the indicator "self-emotion appraisal," a statistically significant difference was also observed between Group 1 (mean rank = 36.30) and Group 3 (mean rank = 47.79), U = 294.00, Z = −2.00, p = .046. Coaches from Group 3 had higher scores in self-emotion appraisal. For the other variables: task goal orientation, general self-esteem, regulation of emotions, utilization of emotions, and others' emotion appraisal, no statistically significant differences were found between any of the groups (all $p > .05$). This indicates that coaches with the shortest experience as athletes (up to 12 years) have significantly higher results in utilization of emotions compared to coaches from the other groups who have more sports experience. No significant differences were found between the latter two groups.

Comparative analysis by coaching experience

Coaching experience was categorized into three groups: Group 1 (up to 3 years, n = 28), Group 2 (4-12 years, n = 50), and Group 3 (13-40 years, n = 26). The results of the test (Kruskal-Wallis H) show statistically significant differences for the following variables: self-emotion appraisal: $\chi^2(2) = 6.781$, p = .034, and others' emotion appraisal: $\chi^2(2) = 12.393$, p = .002. No statistically significant differences were found for all other variables. Overall, the duration of coaching experience is associated with statistically significant differences in aspects of emotional intelligence, specifically in self-emotion appraisal and others' emotion appraisal.

To evaluate the influence of coaching experience on the studied psychological variables, pairwise comparisons between groups (Mann-Whitney U tests) were also conducted. In the comparative analysis between Group 1 (experience up to 3 years) and Group 2 (experience from 4 to 12 years), a statistically significant difference was found for others' emotion appraisal: between Group 1 (mean rank = 30.29) and Group 2 (mean rank = 46.00), U = 442.00, Z = −2.929, p = .003. Coaches from Group 2 showed higher scores in others' emotion appraisal. No statistically significant differences were found between Group 1 and Group 2 for the other variables. In the comparative analysis between Group 1 (with experience of up to 3 years) and Group 3 (13-40 years), a statistically significant difference was found for self-emotion appraisal – Group 1 (mean rank = 21.50) and Group 3 (mean rank = 32.33), U = 196.00, Z = -2.643, p = .008. And again, for others' emotion appraisal, a highly statistically significant difference was revealed between Group 1 (mean rank = 20.43) and Group 3 (mean rank = 33.58), U = 166.00, Z = -3.156, p = .002. Coaches from Group 3 showed higher scores in self-emotion appraisal and others' emotion appraisal. For all other variables, no statistically significant differences were found when comparing these groups. In the comparative analysis between Group 2 (experience from 4 to 12 years) and Group 3 (13-40 years), no statistically significant differences were found for any of the variables. In summary, coaching experience reveals significant differences in others' emotion appraisal between the youngest and middle groups of coaches, as well as significant differences in self-emotion appraisal and others' emotion appraisal between the youngest and most experienced coaches.

Comparative analysis by level of education revealed a statistically significant difference between groups for only one of the variables. Coaches with higher education (mean rank = 55.85) showed significantly higher self-esteem compared to those with secondary education (mean rank = 36.50), U = 486.000, Z = -2.502, p = .012. For the remaining studied variables, no statistically significant differences were found (all $p > .05$).

Comparative analysis by place of residence (workplace) again found only one statistically significant difference between groups. Coaches from Sofia (mean rank = 43.14) showed significantly higher ego-orientation compared to coaches from other cities (mean rank = 33.79), U = 554.00, Z = -2.04, p = .041. For the remaining studied variables, no statistically significant differences were found (all $p > 0.05$).

Comparative analysis (Mann-Whitney U test) by type of sport (individual or team) revealed a highly statistically significant difference between the group of individual sports (mean rank = 62.63) and the group of team sports (mean rank = 43.82). Coaches working in individual sports have a significantly higher ego orientation compared to those from team sports (U = 858.00, Z = -3.18, p = .001). No statistically significant differences were found for the other variables. The obtained results, according to the sport group (individual or team), show that the main difference between the two sport groups lies in ego goal orientation. Representatives of individual sports tend to demonstrate a higher ego orientation, which suggests a stronger focus on self-efficacy and comparison with others. However, regarding all other studied aspects, including task orientation, general self-esteem, and the various components of emotional intelligence (regulation, utilization, self- and others' emotion appraisal), the two groups do not differ statistically significantly. This suggests that, except for the specific area of ego orientation, the characteristics of coaches from both sport groups are similar.

Correlation analysis of the studied variables revealed that task goal orientation is associated with all emotional intelligence scales, whereas ego goal orientation is not related to any of the studied indicators. General self-esteem has a relationship with all emotional intelligence scales. (Table 3).

Table 3. *Correlation analysis.*

Variable	Task Goal Orientation	Ego Goal Orientation	General Self-Esteem	Regulation of Emotions	Utilization of emotions	Self-Emotion Appraisal	Others‘ Emotion Appraisal
Task Goal Orientation	1						
Ego Goal Orientation	-.018	1					
General Self-Esteem	.015	.053	1				
Regulation of Emotions	.233 *	.046	.073	1			
Utilization of emotions	.241 *	-.108	.020	.543 **	1		
Self-Emotion Appraisal	.042	.029	.016	.397 **	.383 **	1	
Others‘ Emotion Appraisal	.116	.003	.056	.366 **	.371 **	.539 **	1

Note: $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$.

Overall, the results highlight a strong interdependence between the various components of emotional intelligence, as well as their relationship with general self-esteem and task goal orientation. Task goal orientation and general self-esteem are positively related to various aspects of emotional intelligence. Coaches who are more task-oriented and have higher self-esteem also show better regulation, utilization, and appraisal of emotions (both their own and others'). This emphasizes the importance of task orientation and general self-esteem for the development of emotional intelligence. The components of emotional intelligence show strong positive correlations with each other, which is consistent with the theory of emotional intelligence as a multidimensional construct. It is curious that ego orientation is not significantly related to any of the other studied variables, which may indicate its relative independence or different influence depending on the context.

Regression analysis

To investigate the influence of emotional intelligence on goal orientations, in the first model, we set task goal orientation as the dependent variable and the parameters of emotional intelligence as independent variables. The regression results show that the only significant predictor included in Model 1 is the regulation of emotions. The final model is statistically significant, $F(1, 102) = 16.76$, $p < .001$, and explains 14.1% of the variance in task goal orientation ($R^2 = .141$, Adjusted $R^2 = .133$). This indicates that the ability to regulate one's own emotions is a significant positive predictor of task goal orientation. In the second model, we set general self-esteem as the dependent variable and the other studied indicators as independent variables. The analysis showed that the only significant predictor entering the model is regulation of emotions. The final regression model is statistically significant, $F(1,102) = 14.041$, $p < .001$. The model explains 12.1% of the variance in the dependent variable, general self-esteem ($R^2 = .121$, Adjusted $R^2 = .112$). The model coefficients indicate that Regulation of Emotions is a significant positive predictor of general self-esteem ($\beta = .348$, $t = 3.747$, $p < .001$). In both regression models, regulation of emotions emerged as the only statistically significant predictor. This is an important result, indicating that coaches' ability to regulate their emotions is related to both their task orientation and their general self-esteem. The other components of emotional intelligence and ego orientation are not included in these models as significant predictors.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of these results is faced with the challenge that motivational orientations (Ego and Task) among coaches have been significantly less studied compared to those in athletes. However, the comparison with the athletes' profile provides a valuable perspective. The psychological profile and motivational characteristics of Bulgarian sports coaches, investigated in the presented study, reveal several key aspects:

Goal Orientations: The studied group of coaches is generally characterized by a higher task goal orientation compared to ego goal orientation, which is also observed in athletes from different sports (Mitsova, 2019; Domuschieva-Rogleva & Yancheva, 2014; Bala & Shaji, 2023). Task goal orientation focuses on skill mastery, personal improvement, and progress, with success measured against one's own previous achievements and efforts. Coaches with such an orientation derive satisfaction from the learning process and are more resilient to setbacks. *Task goal orientation* is significantly higher in coaches with higher education. This suggests the role of formal education in developing adaptive motivational profiles. Coaches who are more task-oriented show better regulation, utilization of emotions, and appraisal of emotions. *Ego goal orientation* is higher in older coaches (46-63 years) compared to middle-aged coaches (34-45 years), and in coaches with longer experience as athletes (21-34 years) compared to those with shorter experience (up to 12 years). It is significantly higher in coaches from Sofia compared to those from other cities, as well as in coaches working in individual sports compared to those in team sports. Mitsova (2019) registered similar results by type of sport. This suggests a stronger focus on self-efficacy and comparison with others in individual sports. Interestingly, ego orientation is not significantly related to any of the other studied variables (emotional intelligence or self-esteem).

Emotional Intelligence: Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize emotions – both one's own and those of others – to facilitate thinking and behavior. In this research, *female coaches* show a significantly higher ability to appraise the emotions of others compared to male coaches. In various cultural contexts, women often show higher scores on scales measuring empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Bar-On, 2006; Bala & Shaji, 2023). Our study confirms this trend in the specific professional group of sports coaches. *Older coaches* (46-63 years) demonstrate higher regulation of emotions, higher self-emotion appraisal, and a better ability to appraise the emotions of others compared to middle-aged coaches (34-45 years). This suggests that with age, coaches develop or change their emotional profiles, becoming better prepared to manage complex emotional situations. Coaches with the *shortest experience as athletes* (up to 12 years) have significantly higher results in the utilization of emotions. Coaches with *longer experience as athletes* (21-34 years) have higher results in self-emotion appraisal compared to those with the shortest experience. The *duration of coaching experience* is associated with significant differences in self-emotion appraisal and others' emotion appraisal. Coaches with 4 to 12 years of experience show higher results in others' emotion appraisal compared to the youngest coaches (up to 3 years of experience). The *most experienced coaches* (13-40 years of experience) show higher results in self-emotion appraisal and others' emotion appraisal compared to the youngest coaches (up to 3 years of experience). Studies in other high-pressure fields, such as management and leadership (e.g., Goleman et al., 2002), also show that emotional maturity and effectiveness increase with the accumulation of professional experience, which is confirmed by our results in the context of sport.

The established relationship between regulation and utilization of emotions with task goal orientation suggests that coaches who effectively manage and utilize their emotions are more focused on the process and development. This emphasizes that coaches' ability to regulate their emotions is related to both their commitment to the process of improvement and a more positive overall self-assessment. In our study, the main predictor for both task goal orientation and general self-esteem is the regulation of emotions. In a study by Bala & Shaji (2023), a significant positive correlation was established between goal orientation and emotional intelligence, with task orientation being a stronger predictor of emotional intelligence. Unlike our study, they posit the influence of Goal Orientation on Emotional Intelligence among athletes, and not the other way around. Their regression analysis indicates that task orientation is a strong positive predictor of emotional intelligence (explaining 25.3% of the variance), whereas ego orientation is also a significant, but much weaker, predictor (explaining 2.9%). Our correlation analysis results also confirm the positive correlation with task goal orientation, just as in their study, but unlike our results, a very low positive correlation with ego goal orientation was found.

General Self-Esteem: It was found that Bulgarian sports coaches have high general self-esteem; they do not differ in their general self-esteem based on gender, age, experience as an athlete, coaching experience, education, or type of sport. General self-esteem shows positive correlations with all aspects of emotional intelligence, a finding also established in other research on adolescent athletes (Fernandes et al., 2024), and the regulation of emotions is a significant positive predictor for coaches' general self-esteem. General self-esteem is an individual's overall evaluation of their own worth and significance. High self-esteem is associated with better psychological adaptation and stress resilience.

The obtained results are valuable and contribute to the understanding of the psychological profiles of sports coaches in the Bulgarian context.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the strong interconnections between different psychological variables in sports coaches. The findings reveal that coaches with a more adaptive motivational profile (higher task orientation) and a positive self-assessment (high self-esteem) also demonstrate higher emotional intelligence, especially in their ability to regulate emotions. Furthermore, demographic and professional factors such as gender, age, coaching experience, and sport type significantly influence coaches' emotional skills and ego orientation. These results underscore the importance of emotional intelligence and task-oriented motivation for effective coaching and provide a solid foundation for future research and training programs aimed at developing these skills in coaches.

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